

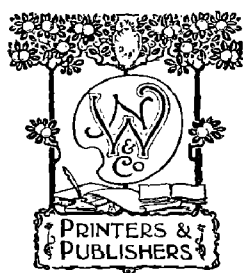
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FAMILIAR INDIAN BIRDS





BIRD-SCARING IN BENGAL
(see p. 10).

FAMILIAR INDIAN BIRDS

BY

GORDON DALGLIESH



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IARI

“ In the Mango-Sprays
The Sun-Birds flashed; alone at his green forge
Toiled the loud Coppersmith; Bee-Eaters hawked,
Chasing the purple butterflies; beneath,
Striped Squirrels raced, the Mynahs perked
And picked, the Seven Brown Sisters chattered
In the thorn, the pied Fish-Tiger hung above the pool,
The Egrets stalked among the buffaloes,
The Kites sailed circles in the golden air.”

The Light of Asia.

INTRODUCTION.

THE new arrival in India cannot help being struck with the number of different birds that are to be seen in an ordinary garden, and even in the large cities and towns of the East bird-life is extraordinarily abundant. Though not nearly so many song birds as one meets with in England, yet there are some which we can class as first-rate musicians, and others whose notes are at least striking and quaint. A pleasing feature with regard to a number of Indian birds is their remarkable tameness, and the reasons for this are not far to seek—one being that the “Mild Hindoo” is very much averse to taking life, and natives that possess guns are few; another is that one is so accustomed out here to see birds of brilliant plumage, that this does not cause a sensation as in England, where, if a beautiful and rare bird is seen, every gun in the place is out after it. Many of the notes contained herein have appeared in the pages of the ‘Zoologist,’ ‘Field,’ ‘Avicultural Magazine,’ and the ‘Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society.’ This little book must not be regarded as exhaustive, for the birds mentioned in it are only a small percentage of those that might be defined as “familiar”; neither must it be taken as a scientific treatise. It is intended chiefly for

those people living in India, who, though themselves not ornithologists in the strict sense of the word, are interested in the birds they are likely to meet in everyday life, and wish to learn something about them. Many of the birds in this work can be seen by English readers in the Zoological Society's Gardens in London. To those who wish to study more deeply the avifauna of our Great Empire, I would recommend the 'Fauna of British India,' bird volumes by Messrs. Blanford and Oates, and the nomenclature adopted here is that of those volumes.

GORDON DALGLIESH.

FAMILIAR INDIAN BIRDS.

THE HOUSE CROW

(*Corvus splendens*).

THERE is an old saying that "familiarity breeds contempt," and with regard to the Crow this is certainly true, for it is, perhaps, the most familiar of all our Indian birds, from the large towns and railway stations right out into the heart of the country. Contempt for the whole human race it certainly has, and the only thing it stands in awe of at all is a gun, and at the sight of this it is off at once, and, as they say of the Rook in England, it seems to smell powder. Nothing in the way of food comes amiss, from dainty tit-bits from the Sahibs' table in the verandah down to the veriest filth and garbage of the bazaar. People accustomed to its nasty thieving ways are apt to grudge it its specific name of *splendens*, but, in spite of its bad character, we must admit the name is an appropriate one. Its whole appearance puts one forcibly in mind of the Jackdaw, but its altogether heavier build and dark eyes distinguish it readily from that bird. Its soft and glossy plumage of purple and green reflections, grey neck, and black cap, all tend to make it a beautiful bird. The House Crow breeds from

April to July, making a nest of sticks, and laying from four to five eggs of the regular Crow type. As well as having to rear its own young, it often has, in addition, to bring up those of the Köel (*Eudynamis honorata*)—a bird which we will notice later—a parasitic Cuckoo that deposits its egg in the Crow's nest. The House Crow is very fond of sipping the juice out of the pots of toddy, or native liquor, exposed for sale in the bazaars, and occasionally becomes a victim to intemperance, and in this state falls into the hands of its most dreaded enemy, man, who is not slow to take advantage of the bird's helpless condition and pay it out for old scores. One poor bird I heard of was once found with its lower mandible cut off by some rascally native, and was hand-fed for some time on sopped bread.

THE COMMON INDIAN MAGPIE

(*Dendrocitta rufa*).

Though not such a bold and cunning thief as its relative the Crow, the Magpie is not above petty larceny and murder. Dr. Jerdon tells of one which used to visit daily a cage of small birds he had in his verandah. It at first only fed on the seed given to the birds, but apparently tiring of this diet, fed on the birds themselves, and was for this misdeed promptly executed. I myself have often watched it feeding on callow nestlings, and it is also very partial to garden produce, such as peas, beans, and fruit of all kinds; but its diet *par excellence* is the eggs of numerous small birds. Unlike our British Magpie, the

Indian bird seldom descends to the ground, but confines its movements to the leafy foliage of trees, and is far oftener seen than heard, its note sounding like "Kook-a-lee." Unlike the English bird, also, it makes no dome to its nest, though fond of building in similar situations, such as thorny trees and shrubs. Though not brilliantly coloured, its soft shades of chestnut, silver grey, and black are pleasing. It breeds in April and May, building commencing about the end of March, and lays three to four eggs, rather small for the size of the bird.

THE JUNGLE BABBLER

(*Crateropus canorus*).

A plain brown little bird, with no pretensions at all to beauty, but one which is a bit of a celebrity in its way, and without which no book on Indian birds would be complete. Natives call them the "Sat-bhai," *i.e.*, Seven Brothers; Anglo-Indians avow them to be of the gentler sex, and call them Seven Sisters; while to naturalists it is known as the Jungle Babbler (*Crateropus canorus*). As might be supposed from the foregoing remarks, these birds go about as a rule—but, according to my experience, *not* always—in parties of seven. To live together in brotherly (or sisterly) love is not by any means their motto, and it would be hard to find a more noisy or disreputable family party. An amusing account of these birds is given in a book called 'The Tribes on My Frontier,' the author of which says: "Among themselves they will quarrel by the hour, and bandy

foul language like fishwives; but let a stranger treat one of their number with disrespect, and the other six are in arms at once. The 'Sat-bhai' see as far through a stone wall as any birds, and the recollection of how they outwitted me about their nests when oology was my mania keeps me humble to this day. They positively set up a fictitious nest for my benefit, and broke into a guffaw as they saw me climbing the tree. . . . Like Wordsworth's opinionative child, they are seven."

Like most bad people, however, the "Sat-bhai" have their good points, one being, as will be seen from the above, that they will stick to a comrade in distress, the other being that they lay the most exquisite shade of blue egg, even more lovely than that of our Hedge Sparrow. They are, moreover, excellent watchers, and if any stray cat, fox, or other animal should wander too near the dominion they regard as their own, they will pour out such a volley of abuse that one is forced to seek the cause and chase away the unwelcome stranger. The flight of these birds is short and weak; they much prefer shuffling about and hopping to flying. They are said to be good eating, but, never having tried one, I am unable to offer any opinion. In parts of Bengal, at any rate, they breed throughout the year, but I am not aware if this is the case in other parts of India. The number of eggs is usually from four to six, and they are one of the commonest represented in Indian collections. Some of our modern ornithologists have, I believe, included in the family of Babblers our modest and humble little Hedge Sparrow; but per-

sonally I am not inclined to agree to this, and should be sorry to see such an inoffensive, peace-loving little bird mixed up with such a plebeian crew as the "Sat-bhai."

THE BLACK DRONGO, OR KING CROW
(*Dicrurus ater*).

As soon as the faintest glimmer of dawn breaks through the eastern sky, the sweet, far-reaching note of the Drongo is sure to be heard heralding the coming morn, as this is in India the earliest bird to rise. The Drongo may well be called the most characteristic of our Indian birds, and the traveller is sure to see it everywhere, for one of them is to be seen on every few yards of the telegraph wire as one looks from the railway carriage window. I must confess to having a great liking for the King Crow. Though by nature pugnaciously inclined, he is no coward, and, unlike the Crow, is above-board and honest in all his dealings, and will not hesitate to attack a bird much larger than himself—a bird even as big as a Kite—and is a most devoted husband and father. The King Crow is a somewhat solitary bird, and does not fraternize much with other species, and jealously guards the post of vantage it regards as its own, whether it be telegraph wire, tree stump, or bovine back, for it has a great partiality for perching on the backs of cattle. Its diet is purely insectivorous, and its mode of catching its prey is Flycatcher-like. In aerial evolutions it excels, and its curious twisting

flight is very pretty to watch. The Drongo is so closely mimicked by a species of Cuckoo (*Surniculus lugubris*) that it requires a practised eye to distinguish the two birds at a glance. This impostor, trading on its likeness to the King Crow, deposits its egg in that bird's nest. The King Crow has many relatives in India; among them is one known as the Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dissemurus paradiseus*), which has its outer tail-feathers lengthened considerably into bare shafts, feathered only at the tip. The natives in Darjeeling used to tell me wonderful tales about this Drongo, which they called the King or Rajah bird, which all small birds were said to follow to pay homage to. To return, however, to the King Crow, it may be said that it breeds in April, May, June, and July, making a neat nest in the fork of some tree. The eggs are pink, spotted, rarely white. The King Crow is a neat compact little bird, with black glossy plumage, and a long forked tail which puts me in mind very much of that of the Blackcock.

THE TAILOR BIRD

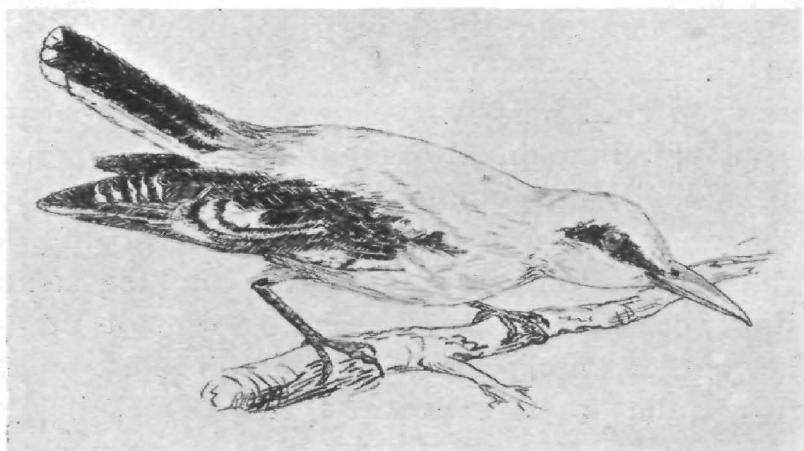
(*Orthotomus sutorius*).

All of us who have read Rudyard Kipling's 'Jungle Book' will be familiar with the story of "Dirzee, the Tailor Bird." In this he makes the bird say, "Tailor and singer am I." Tailor he certainly is, but singer—no. Loud and clear notes he has, but no one could, with any truth, call it a song. Nearly every book relating to general natural history gives some account,

more or less true, of the wonderful structure, the nest, for which the Tailor Bird is famed; but, like many other famous birds, we are apt to be disappointed when the actual architect is brought face to face with us for the first time, for our little friend is quite a small, insignificant, greenish bird, with a long tail. The nest is, indeed, a truly wonderful piece of work, and we are not at all likely to be disappointed with this. It is made out of a single large leaf, neatly sewed together, and lined with soft down from the cotton plant. It builds very often quite close to houses, and one nest was placed on a croton plant in a pot standing on my verandah. No one has, I believe, actually seen the bird at work on its nest, and here is an opportunity for some enterprising field naturalist to investigate the matter and tell us how it is done, or, better still, take photographs of the bird in the act. Among other wonderful nest-builders found in India are the Weaver Birds. One, the Baya (*Ploceus baya*), is common in many parts. This bird is about the size of a Sparrow and very much the same shape. The male, in breeding plumage, is brown, with a yellow cap. The nest is just as neat a piece of avian architecture as that of the Tailor Bird, and is a long flask-shaped affair, beautifully woven together and suspended from a leaf or branch.

THE INDIAN ORIOLE (*Oriolus kundoo*).

One of the most beautiful of all our Indian birds that enliven the too-often dull monotony of the surrounding scenery. Its soft, liquid notes, though not exactly amounting to a song, are much more pleasing than many of the songs of singing birds. Both this



INDIAN ORIOLE.

bird and the Black-headed Oriole (*Oriolus melanocephalus*) are known to Anglo-Indians as "Mango Bird," the bright yellow plumage resembling the colour of the ripe mango fruit. Their beautifully suspended nests are hung on the branches of sisso and pepul trees, from ten to thirty feet above ground. Their food is fruit and insects, and they are never seen on the ground, but confine their attentions to the very tops of trees. A resident for many years in India

told me she once saw a Golden Oriole and a Roller (*Coracias indica*) perched on a clump of "morning glory," a plant of the convolvulus tribe with deep blue flowers, and she said that the light blue of the Roller and the rich yellow of the Oriole contrasted beautifully with the dark blue flowers, and was a sight—the whole being enlivened with brilliant sunshine—not easily forgotten. The Golden Oriole does not bear confinement well, and ought never to be caged, unless, of course, to send to England, where it would doubtless be thought a great deal of. The Indian Oriole ranges over the whole of India, where in the north-west it meets with the true Golden Oriole (*Oriolus galbula*), a bird that has nested in England, and would doubtless continue to do so were it not molested by so-called "collectors," whose one aim in life seems to be to kill every rare and beautiful bird they come across.

THE COMMON MYNAH

(*Acridotheres tristis*).

I can never understand why Linnæus gave the specific name of *tristis* to this bird, as it is quite a libel on its whole nature; for, far from being sad or melancholy, it is one of the most active and cheerful of our Indian birds. It is very likely Linnæus's description might have been taken from a stuffed specimen, and if such was the case, then perhaps the bird, as he saw it, might well have looked sad and melancholy. The generic name *Acridotheres*, i.e. grasshopper-catcher,

is much more appropriate, as the bird consumes vast numbers of these insect pests. When the indigo is being brought into the vats, the whole plant swarms with insects of all sorts and sizes, which delight the heart of the entomologist and the Mynah, and on these occasions both are in their glory. With stately and sidelong step the Mynah will pick the insects up



MYNAH.

at one's very feet, and, indeed, at times such as these it is remarkably tame, hardly troubling to get out of one's way. Despite its usefulness in destroying insects, the Mynah will at times commit sad havoc among the crops when the grain is ripe, and is only induced to leave by the shouts of numerous small and scantily clothed boys, posted on a platform of grass and bamboos known as a *machan*, whose duty it is,

from sunrise to sunset, to drive the Mynahs and other grain-eating birds from the crops.

Even the veriest novice in ornithology can see at a glance that the Mynah is a thorough Starling. In its very actions, voice, and mode of nesting it closely resembles that bird, and, like it, lays pretty blue eggs of the regular Starling type. Nearly the whole of the Indian Empire is invaded by the Mynah, from Kashmir to Mergui, and it is found in the hills at moderate elevations. Among other Indian forms which are more or less familiar, there is the Bank Mynah (*Acridotheres ginginianus*), nearly allied to the present bird, and nesting in holes in sand-banks; the Jungle Mynah (*Æthiopsar fuscus*); the Grey-headed (*Sturnia malabarica*) and Black-headed Mynahs (*Temenuchus pagadorum*), the last two being small birds much prized by natives as cage-birds; and the beautiful Pied Mynah (*Sturnopastor contra*), which in its form approaches very closely to the true Starling, and builds, in societies, on peepul and other trees, large and untidy nests.

THE DHYAL (*Copsychus saularis*).

So accustomed are we to the sight of the familiar Robin Redbreast in England that it will cause us, perhaps, no little surprise, on our first arrival in India, to have pointed out to us a pretty little pied bird as the Robin; for under this name is the Dhyal known to Anglo-Indians. However, "What's in a name?" and the bird now under consideration is not

unlike a Robin, save for colour. Its mode of living and habits closely resemble our thoroughly English bird, and it lives, like it, close to human habitations. The male bird is black and white; the female differs in having a lot of grey in her plumage. It possesses a sweet, clear song, and has a variety of notes. Although being one of the commonest of Indian birds, it is shy and retiring, and, in consequence, not observed so readily as many others. Its favourite haunts are bamboo jungles and shrubberies bordering gardens. It is an early bird to rise and a late one to retire. During the heat of the day it keeps close under cover, but at sunrise it will often be seen busily searching for food on grass-plots. It makes an interesting cage-bird, and is often kept as such by natives, who feed it on a diet of meal-paste and grasshoppers. The Dhyal breeds in April, May, and June, five appearing to be the full complement of eggs.

VAN HASSELT'S SUNBIRD

(*Arachnechthra hasselti*).

The Honeysuckers, or Sunbirds, to a certain extent replace in the Old World the Humming Birds of the New. It would, perhaps, be hard to find more exquisite little birds than these, of which several species are found in India. Van Hasselt's Sunbird is, to my mind, the loveliest of the whole family. It is a small bird, about the size of a Goldcrest, and, indeed, the brilliancy of its plumage rivals many of the far-famed Humming Birds. The male has the whole head

shining metallic green, shoulders velvety black, upper back purplish green, throat bronze, under parts bright red. This description, I fear, cannot do justice to the bird, but some colours in nature almost defy description. The females of Sunbirds are quite dull, having for the most part a mixture of green and yellow, and it is only in the breeding season that some of the males exhibit the brilliant colours, being at other times



PURPLE SUNBIRD.

sober, like the females. The Purple Sunbird (*Arachnechthra asiatica*) is a common species in many Indian gardens, and has, for so small a bird, a very loud, clear song, not unlike that of the English Wren. The nests of Sunbirds are made of moss, fibres, and cobwebs, oval in shape, with an entrance-hole at the side, and these are usually suspended from a twig, rarely from the eaves of houses. The Amethyst-rumped Sunbird (*Arachnechthra zeylonica*) is often sold as a cage-bird

in Calcutta, and, I believe, does well for a time. A friend of mine had one which was fed on a moistened sugary paste. Nearly allied to the Honeysuckers are a group of small birds known as Flowerpeckers (*Dicæidæ*). They frequent the tops of trees, and feed on insects and fruit. The sexes, as a rule, are different, and the males are often very brilliantly coloured. They build beautiful nests, suspended from twigs. They are represented in India and over all the warm regions of the Old World.

THE CRIMSON-BREASTED BARBET

(*Xantholæma hæmatocephala*).

The Barbets are essentially birds of the Tropics, occasionally ascending the hills to moderate elevations, and in their brilliant colouring, shape of their feet, and mode of nesting resemble Woodpeckers. Nearly all the Barbets of India are fruit-eaters, many of the African and South American forms being insectivorous. As soon as the really hot weather makes itself felt throughout the Indian plains, the monotonous cry of the Crimson-breasted Barbet—or, as it is better known to residents in India, the “Coppersmith,”—is heard almost without ceasing from morn to night. The notes sound like “Tonk-tonk-tonk,” and so closely do they resemble the hammering on a piece of metal as to almost deceive many people; hence the name “Coppersmith.” If one is sufficiently interested in birds as to wonder from which one’s throat this curious sound proceeds, he will, if he looks carefully, discover,

probably perched on the very top of some tall tree, two quaint little birds about the size of a Sparrow, but adorned with the most brilliant shades of green, crimson, and yellow. One of the birds sits perfectly motionless, while the other one gravely bows to it, jerking out these curious metallic sounds in quick succession. When you have seen this you may know them to be a pair of "Coppersmiths" in love, and the



BLUE-FACED BARBET.

male—the one who bows so gravely—is wooing his mate. The constant monotonous notes so get on our nerves that we often feel tempted to shoot the author of them, though no doubt they fall as sweet music on the ears that they are intended for. *Chacun à son goût!*

The "Coppersmith" is almost entirely a bird of the hot weather. It is true one *may* hear them occa-

sionally in the cold weather, but then only for a short time, and then the notes are only uttered in a half-hearted manner. The nesting arrangements of this bird, as before stated, are Woodpecker-like, the hole being hollowed out in a tree or bamboo, and the eggs, which are pure white, being laid at the bottom of the hole, with no lining at all. A more beautiful bird than the "Coppersmith" is the Blue-faced Barbet (*Cyanops asiatica*), a most gorgeously coloured bird, with shades of blue, green, and bright crimson all blended together in exquisite harmony. The note of this Barbet differs considerably from that of the "Coppersmith," and may be likened to the syllables "Kuturruk" uttered at slow intervals, but is quite as monotonous as that of its kinsman.

THE INDIAN ROLLER

(*Coracias indica*).

"Fine feathers do not always make fine birds" is certainly true with regard to the Indian Roller, which has a harsh unpleasant cry, and is, moreover, one of the most pugnacious of Indian birds, and rarely loses an opportunity of fighting with one of its own kin and sundry other birds. The Indian Roller, or, as it is better known to Anglo-Indians, "Blue Jay," is, like the Golden Oriole and King Crow, one of the features of an Indian landscape, and I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that on a journey from Bombay to Tirhoot, in Bengal, I saw from the carriage window on an average one Roller for every two or three telegraph-

poles. I once read in some book that the American globe-trotter's name for the Roller was "Surprise-bird," and I think a very good name too. Seen as it sits with closed wings on the telegraph-wires or posts, it is not much to look at, but see it as it takes to flight and the startling display of dark and light blue wings and tail is very striking. When not engaged in quarrelling, the Roller is a sedentary and lazy bird, only leaving its perch to chase some passing insect. I have brought up young birds, which were not at all difficult to rear. On one occasion I saw a Roller hover over and plunge into water like a Kingfisher, and this suggested to my mind an interesting theory. The Roller is very Kingfisher-like in many of its ways, and might not this taste for water have been inherited by a bird whose ancestors descended from Kingfisher-like birds? The Indian Roller is regarded as sacred by all pious Hindoos, and when I first came out to India, everything being new to me, and also being very keen on collecting birds, I was in the act of shooting a specimen, when an English-speaking Hindoo lad that accompanied me laid his hand on my arm and said earnestly: "Do not shoot pretty bird, Sir; like God." To his mind the beauty of the bird and that of his Deity were one, and out of respect to his feelings I lowered my gun. It is a curious fact that though Rollers appear to feel the heat as much as any bird, and sit with gaping bills during a hot day, they seldom drink. The Indian Roller is found over the greater part of the Indian Empire, and is replaced in Burma and some parts of India by a closely allied species, the Burmese Roller (*Coracias*

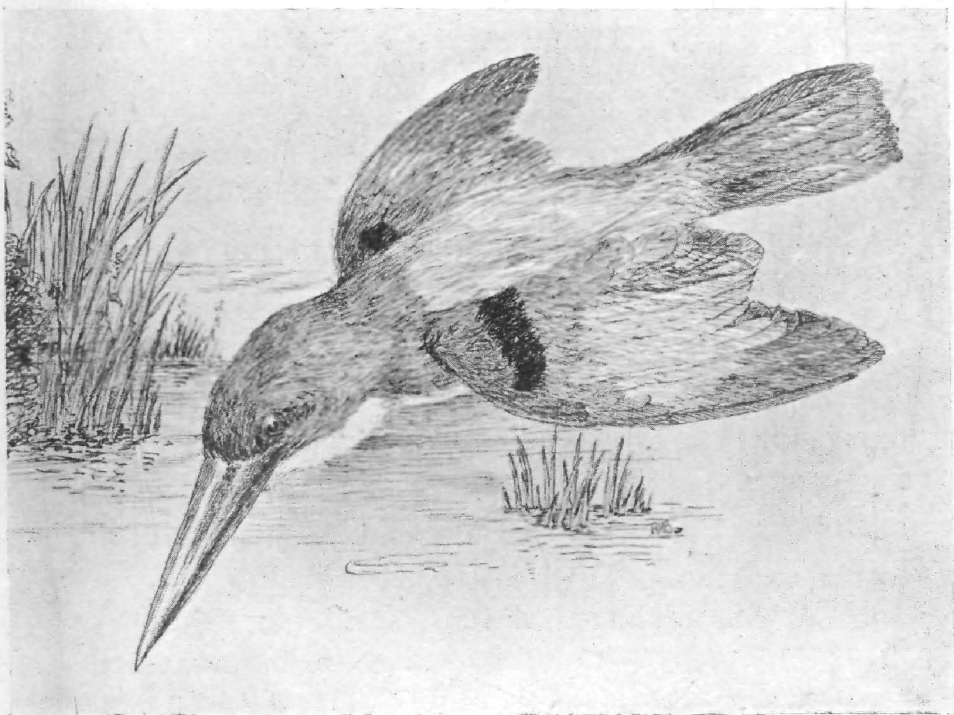
affinis), which is darker in coloration. These two species frequently interbreed with each other.

Near the Rollers should be placed the family of Bee-eaters (*Meropidæ*). They are small birds of brilliant plumage. Their bill is long and arched, their feet have united toes, and their wings and tail are long. The sexes are alike. They are inhabitants of all the warmer regions of the Old World. They feed on insects, which are captured on the wing. They nest in burrows, in colonies in sand-banks, as a rule not far from water, laying white eggs. A common Indian species is the Green Bee-eater (*Merops viridis*).

THE WHITE-BREASTED KINGFISHER (*Halcyon smyrnensis*).

The Kingfishers resemble the Bee-eaters in the shape of the foot, their habit of nesting in burrows, and in laying round white eggs. They are, as a rule, though not always, brilliantly coloured birds, and the greater number of species occur in warm countries. The sexes are alike in plumage. They are for the greater part fish-eaters, though some feed on land animals, while others, again, partake of both. Some species watch for their prey from a branch, and dart upon it; others, such as a common Indian species, the Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle varia*), hover over their finny prey like a Kestrel, before finally darting upon it. The White-breasted Kingfisher is common in many parts of India and Asia Minor, having beautifully variegated wings, and showing a large white patch, like those of

the Common Mynah. It has a harsh unpleasant note, and may often be seen flying aimlessly about, uttering a peculiar wailing cry. This is one of the Indian birds that needs protection, as vast numbers are being killed, by the Mahomedan natives of Bengal, for the sake of



WHITE-BREASTED KINGFISHER.

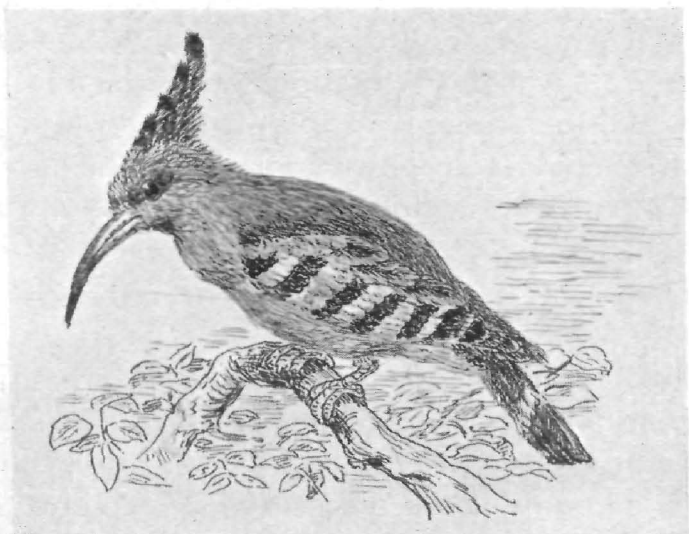
their plumage. I have always found them extremely wary and difficult to approach. This is one of the species that does not confine its attentions to fish alone, feeding on worms and insects, and I strongly suspect, at times the young of other birds.

THE HOOPOE

(Upupa epops).

The Hoopoes are a group of small and elegantly formed birds, which are either resident or migratory all over the Old World, except Australia. In plumage they are much alike, being for the most part light brown with black-and-white wings, and a crest, when expanded, fan-shaped. They walk well, and feed on insects, which are picked up with the long curved bill. There are two species of Hoopoes found in India—the Common or European Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), which is a winter visitor; and the resident bird, the Indian Hoopoe (*Upupa indica*). These two may be distinguished from each other by the Indian bird having a cinnamon tone to the plumage, whereas the Common one is buff. As these two do not differ at all in habits, the following remarks may equally apply to both species. They must be well known to all Indian residents as lively little birds which trot about the grass-plots, or at the side of the road, uttering their cry of “hoop, hoop, hoop.” The crest is only raised when they alight or are alarmed. Their flight is remarkably pretty, reminding one of some huge butterfly. Although being nice clean-looking little birds in themselves, their nesting arrangements, I fear, are sadly in want of a sanitary inspector; and the nest itself is a mass of malodorous corruption, and any one who has visited one would not, I imagine, be anxious to do so a second time. They nest in holes in trees, walls, and eaves of houses, and there is one instance on record

where a pair nested in the thorax of a decomposing human body! The eggs are white, or bluish white. The Hoopoe was worshipped by the ancient Egyptians, and was placed on the sceptre of Horus as a symbol of joy and filial affection.



HOOPOE.

THE HAWK-CUCKOO (*Hierococcyx varius*).

To the exile in India, who is forced to remain indoors during the greater part of the long hot Indian summer's day, the different cries and sounds of birds, beasts, and insects, heard day after day with no change, begin at length to become irksome. I have alluded to the none too melodious cry of the Barbets, but this in no way can compare with the cordially detested voice of the Hawk-Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) or "Brain-

fever Bird." As sure as its voice is heard throughout the land, so surely is the summer coming, with its heat and numerous discomforts. When the temperature is well over a hundred in the shade, then the Brain-fever Bird begins to tune up, and its hateful cry is heard all day, and night too. Indeed, it is a mystery to me how or when it finds time for eating or sleeping. If you can imagine someone whistling in a very shrill high key and gradually ascending the scale to its fullest pitch, then coming half-way down again, and finally ending up with "brain-fever" repeated several times—or, as some have it, "we feel it"—you have a very good idea of the bird's cry. Another rendering of it is: "O lor'! O lor'! how very hot it's getting; I feel it, I feel it," &c. The Brain-fever Bird is another of the parasitic Cuckoos, and deposits its eggs in the nests of the "Seven Sisters." It has been said that "India is a country cursed with Cuckoos," and the list truly is a long one, and most of them have peculiar cries. There is one that says most distinctly, "Make more pekoe." This is the Indian Cuckoo (*Cuculus micropterus*). There is another large ground-frequenting Cuckoo, known as the "Coucal" (*Centropus sinensis*), or to Anglo-Indians as "Pheasant," on account of its slight resemblance to that bird. This bird calls out "puss, puss," in a very deep voice. One commences slowly with the words, then another one takes up the tale, and seems to say, "That's not the way to say it—puss, puss, puss, puss," uttered very quickly. While yet there is another Cuckoo, a very well-known Indian bird indeed, the "Koel" (*Eudnamys honorata*),

whose cry of "Who are you?" is another harbinger of summer. The only Cuckoo whose voice all of us are glad to hear is the Common or European Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), which is heard commonly at Darjeeling at certain seasons, and its familiar call brings to mind a host of memories that few of us would be without.

THE ROSE-RINGED PAROQUET

(*Palæornis torquatus*).

The Parrot family is but poorly represented in India, and, considering the size of the country and climate, one would expect to see more forms than there are. None of the Indian species attain to any large size, the largest being about the size of a Crow, and the smallest, the Loriquets, being little larger than a Sparrow. These last-named hold a unique position among birds in general by their habit of sleeping head downwards, hanging from their perch by their feet, like a bat. The Rose-ringed Paroquet (*Palæornis torquatus*) is found all over India, and is the most plentiful of the genus. It is essentially a bird of the plains, being found but rarely, if ever, on the hills. It frequents cultivated ground, where it commits sad havoc among the crops, and I have seen flocks of them carrying off whole heads of millet at a time; so one can imagine they are not much in favour with the agriculturist. They compensate for this, in a small measure, by being readily tamed, and make amusing pets, and are, moreover, excellent eating; and by their swift Sandpiper-like flight afford good sport, and are

by no means easy to bring down. The Ring-necked Paroquet builds in holes in societies in large trees or ruined buildings. I remember one nesting-place in particular, a large cotton-tree, which was used by vast numbers of these birds, and a pretty sight it was to watch them wheeling round the tree, the green of their plumage and the huge red blossoms of the tree contrasting nicely. As a talker this bird does not compare favourably with its Australian or South American cousins, though one or two I have heard were very fair performers. They are, however, much in favour among the native population, who keep the poor birds shut up in narrow cramped cages where there is hardly room to turn round, a poor exchange for its wild free life. The natural voice of this Paroquet is a harsh unmusical squeal, and is a thoroughly Indian sound. This species is subject to variation, yellow varieties being not uncommon.

THE INDIAN SPOTTED OWLET

(*Athene brama*).

In a certain garden in Bengal that I know well, stands an ancient banyan-tree. This is the haunt of a colony of Spotted Owlets (*Athene brama*), birds closely allied to the European Little Owl (*Athene noctua*), the far-famed bird of Minerva. These Little Owlets are very noisy, and keep up a continuous chatter. A pair built their nest near the house, and for some reason or other one of the birds took a violent dislike to my father. It would swoop down and peck

at his head if he went anywhere near the nest, and so violent were its onsets that it actually drew blood, and on one occasion lifted the cap from off his head. Other people, strangely enough, the Owl left alone, and my father was the only member of the household on whom it ever vented its spite. Most curious and quaint little birds are these Owls. If you should happen to disturb one from its sleep in some tree during the day, it will blink and peer at you, snapping its bill the while, and going through the most absurd antics, bowing and curtsying. I once watched the courtship of a pair of these Owls. During this time the male bird was most attentive to the female, and kept feeding her on large beetles. The process of eating the beetles was effected in this manner: the female would throw back her head, and, after two or three gulps, the beetle would be swallowed. She would then shake her tail and shut her eyes, with evident satisfaction. From the castings I have examined, their food seems to consist of insects and bats, and on one occasion I found in one nest a half-grown rat. A nest found in an outhouse contained three young birds and one fresh egg. I took the young away, together with the parent bird, which was caught on the nest. I kept her for a day and then released her. About a month afterwards three fresh eggs were found in the same nest, but whether they were laid by the same bird is not certain, though I think it very probable they were. Unlike most other Owls, this one is somewhat sedentary in its habits, and prefers to sit and watch for its prey from some post of vantage, as

the roof of a house, or a tree-stump. It comes out early in the evening and retires late, just about the time the King Crow begins to tune up. The list of Owls found in India is a lengthy one, and beyond the scope of the present work; but among the common forms I might mention the Barn Owl (*Strix flammea*), a bird often found in the neighbourhood of Indian houses,



BARN OWL.

and of almost world-wide distribution, and, being subject to much climatic variation, has given rise to many bad species; and it may be as well to say that there is in reality only one Barn Owl. No bird has suffered more at the hands of vulgar superstition than the Owl, both at home and abroad; and natives in India always speak of it as something devilish and

uncanny, and if one should happen to enter a house they say a death is certain to take place. I am sorry to say it is not only the uneducated and ignorant who look upon the Owl as a bird of ill-omen, but educated, civilized people as well. On a voyage I was making from India, when we were many miles out at sea, a Short-eared Owl (*Asio accipitrinus*) alighted on board. Shortly after this an old lady died, and was buried at sea. Some of the passengers regarded her death as due to the visit of the Owl, and said, "Ah! we knew something dreadful would happen as soon as we saw that bird aboard!"

From our childhood we have always read of Owls as being associated with goblins, witches, and other uncanny creatures. Perhaps their soft movements, great round face, staring eyes, and extraordinary voice may have had something to do with this superstition, and, indeed, the cries of some Owls are very startling, even to people accustomed to them, on a dark night; and to those who do not know whence the strange cries proceed, it is positively alarming. But the poor Owl means no harm, and we must not judge him on account of his unmelodious voice, but "be to his faults a little blind, and to his virtues ever kind."

THE VULTURE AND KITE.

It is not without some feelings of disgust we look upon those loathsome birds the Vultures; and yet without these same birds, and various other scavengers, people in India would not be able to exist. Whether

by sight or scent Vultures are guided to their quarry has, I believe, never been satisfactorily proved, but the marvellously quick way they *do* find it has to be seen to be believed. At one place in India where I resided, a horse had to be shot, and the only method of conveying its somewhat unwieldy carcass to the tanner's was by water, and this was effected in the following manner. The body was dragged into the lake, and a native sat astride of it, and paddled it down from one end of the water to the other, where the tanner was awaiting to skin it. When the dead body of the horse started on its journey, not a Vulture was to be seen in the clear blue sky. By the time it arrived at the other end of the lake—about a mile—a score or more of hungry birds were wheeling round and round the horse, in full expectation of a meal. I think very often the Vultures are guided to their meal by the noisy cawings of the Crows. The first birds to find out a dead thing in India are the Crows, and these may in a sense act “Jackal” to the Vulture. My father told me he had once seen a Vulture, Jackal, Pariah Dog, and about a dozen Crows, all taking a meal together off a decomposed human body! This, horrible as it may seem, is no unusual sight in many parts of India. To those who have never been there, it may be as well here to allude to the method Hindoos have for the disposal of their dead. The corpse is taken to the river, to a place known as a “burning ghât,” and, after various ceremonies, it is placed on a stack of wood and burnt. This is the proper method of doing it, but unfortunately is not always carried out strictly

to the letter, and the corpse is just merely singed, and allowed to float on the water, the reason being that in many districts wood is an expensive luxury, and the poorer classes cannot afford to buy much, and very often wood is not used at all, only a handful of straw. During the year 1900 the dreadful plague visited a certain district in Bengal I was in, and every day, for weeks at a time, a score or more of deaths occurred daily, and in consequence one can well imagine what sort of place the burning ghât would have been but for the Vultures. The banks of the river, for as far as the eye could see, was one living mass of Vultures, Crows, Kites, and Dogs, the Vultures predominating; and one almost wondered where this vast mass of life had come from.

My brother and I, when out riding one day, came across a Vulture so gorged that it could not move, and as we rode almost upon it, it vomited the contents of its last meal, and merely waddled out of our way. Horrible as these birds are, one cannot help being struck with admiration for their wonderful flight. High up in the air, in the "blue vault of heaven," they will wheel and soar for an hour at a time, and never once during this performance have I seen them use their wings. The commonest species of Vultures met with in India are the King Vulture (*Otogyph calvus*), the Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*), and the small white Scavenger Vulture (*Neophron ginginianus*). Vultures build a large nest of sticks, placed on high trees, and lay white eggs.

The first bird I saw when I landed on Indian soil,

in Bombay, was the Kite (*Milvus govinda*), and never shall I forget my astonishment at seeing so large a bird in a crowded city. Here the Kite is as much at home as the London Sparrow, and is just as bold, if not more so. We are all doubtless acquainted with the old nursery rhyme of the old man in Bombay whose pipe was carried off by a Kite, and this is by no means exaggerated. Everything the Kite takes a fancy to is its lawful booty, and, not content with pilfering tit-bits from the plates and dishes in the verandah, it will, if it gets the chance, carry off spoons and forks. What it wants with these things I cannot say, unless it has a taste for decorating, and carries them off to adorn its nest. I was once asked to shoot some Kites which had become so numerous as to be a perfect nuisance. Nothing was safe from their mischievous claws, and the servants, conveying dishes of food from the cook-house to the bungalow, were waylaid by these dusky marauders and robbed wholesale. A few shot, and hung up as a warning to evil-doers, seemed for a time to have a wholesome effect, for the Kites took their unwelcome attentions elsewhere.

The cry of the Kite is one of the most melancholy sounds—a long-drawn querulous squeal, which resembles the word “chiloor,” by which name it is known to natives in parts of Bengal. The Kite is an arrant coward, and allows itself to be bullied by every other bird, and often flies in terror from the relentless attacks of the plucky little King Crow. Like the Vulture and Crow, it is a thorough scavenger, and nothing, however nasty, in the way of food comes

amiss to it. Another bird, known to Anglo-Indians as "Brahminy" Kite (*Haliastur indus*), is a common bird, but it is, strictly speaking, not a true Kite, having closer affinities with the Sea Eagles, and is not a foul feeder like the common bird, but is fonder of a diet of fish than anything else. Indeed, the name "Fish Kite" might well be applied to it. It is rather a handsome bird, having the wings chestnut-red and the head and tail white. Its cry closely resembles the bleating of a goat.

QUAILS.

For a nice, good, all-round sporting bird give me the Quail (*Coturnix communis*). A thorough game-bird it is in every sense of the word, and a handsome one to boot; and these are by no means all its good qualities. The best one to many people, perhaps, would be when it is nicely roasted and served on toast, for the Quail is one of the best of edible birds. The majority of Quails found in India are but seasonal visitants, though a number remain all the year round. In certain districts they occur in countless numbers, and tremendous bags are made by sportsmen. When out shooting one day I hit a Quail, which "towered" for several feet, and before it had finished doing so was pounced on by a Harrier, which was in the act of carrying it off when a charge from my second barrel laid it low. These Harriers seem to know by instinct that something which means food to them is afoot, and while Partridge-driving was going on I have seen them flapping leisurely along just in front of the line of beaters; and if a wounded bird should fall any

distance away, it is at once swooped on and carried off. The Quail is snared in large quantities by natives, and sold to Europeans, who keep them alive in so-called "Quail-pits," places where just light enough is admitted to allow the birds to see their food. Here they fatten readily, and are used for the table as required. The year 1899 was an exceptionally good one for Quail in a certain part of Bengal, and we used to shoot numbers daily. We had Quail cooked for every meal, in an endless variety of ways; so that long before the



BLUE-BREASTED QUAIL.

season was over I was so heartily sick of them that nothing would induce me to eat them any more. Being very pugnacious, cock Quails are in much demand among a certain class of natives, who use them for fighting, two birds being pitted one against the other, until the fight ends in the death of one or both.

The favourite haunts of Quails are among grass,

corn, and other crops, through which they run swiftly, reminding one more of a rat or other small animal than a bird. Their note is a loud, clear whistle, which is said to resemble the words "Wet my feet." They fly swiftly and low, and go straight away like a Partridge, and are difficult to flush a second time. A beautiful species of Quail, found in many parts of India, is known as the Blue-breasted or Painted Quail (*Excalphatoria chinensis*). It is a small bird, about the size of a Sparrow. The male has the upper parts brown vermiculated with black, breast slaty-blue, rest of lower parts chestnut. The sides of the head are slate-grey, lower parts of cheeks, chin, and throat black, enclosing on each side a white stripe. The female is duller, and lacks the blue breast. The eyes of the male are bright crimson, those of the female brown. Personally I have only once come across this lovely little bird, and for a short account of its habits I shall quote Blanford, who says:—"This, like other Quails, is generally found in grass, singly or in pairs. It keeps to open, rather swampy ground, and is often met with around paddy fields. Its note is a low double whistle. Its food consists chiefly of grass seeds. This species breeds in Northern India, Bengal, and Pegu, from the latter end of June to the middle of August, and lays from four to six eggs in a small hollow on the ground amidst short grass."

There is a small genus of birds commonly known to sportsmen in India as Button Quails. Though agreeing with the true Quails in many respects, they differ widely in others. None of them are migra-

tory. The females are larger, and, as a rule, more brilliantly coloured than the males. Curiously enough, during the period of incubation it is the male which sits, and tends the young when hatched, the females wandering about and fighting with each other. In one other important respect they differ from the true Quails, by wanting the hallux or hind toe. They inhabit grass-jungle and crops, only leaving these retreats early in the mornings and evenings, and living for the most part a solitary life, and are seldom seen unless flushed by a dog or men walking through the grass. They only fly for a short distance, dropping quickly again, and are difficult to flush a second time. Five species are found in India, the commonest being the Indian Button Quail (*Turnix tanki*), which breeds in July and August, laying spotted eggs—usually four in number—in a hollow on the ground under a bush or tuft of grass.

THE BLACK PARTRIDGE, OR FRANCOLIN (*Francolinus vulgaris*).

The Black Partridge occurs throughout Northern India, and in some parts is exceedingly abundant; its cheerful cry is heard in nearly every grass and field where there are crops. Their cry has been syllabized in many ways. The indigo planters of Behar say it says "Be quick, pay your debts." Natives have it, "*Subhân, teri Kudrat*" (omnipotent, thy power), or "*Lashan, piáj adrak*" (garlic, onions, ginger); but to me it sounds like "*Tee tee, tee tee tee*," uttered very quickly.

They are the best birds at running I know, and are very difficult to flush, reminding one of the Corncrake in this respect. It certainly follows the French Partridge's advice to its English brother to "ron most queek on your legs," for fly it won't unless absolutely forced to do so, and I have even known it double back and run through the line of beaters rather than rise, and at times it is most puzzling to know what can have become of it. You mark your bird into a small clump of grass which is quite isolated, and think for certain you now have him, and send the beaters through in a line. But no bird rewards you as you come to the end of the grass. The bird was certainly there, and where can it have gone to? The only solution to the mystery I can think of is, that it either squats low on the ground and chances being trodden on, or else creeps into some hole. They wander about a good deal, and if you wish to shoot any you must not put off until to-morrow, for very likely, if you do, where they were plentiful yesterday to-day not one will be found. It is hopeless to try to get any until after the crops are cut, for, as I said before, they will not rise, and it means chasing them from one field to another. Of course, in cases like this a good dog is invaluable, and with it you *may* get them to rise.

The Black Partridge is very fair eating if hung for a day or two in cold weather. Their food consists of various grain and seeds, and one I shot had a number of black ants in its crop. Their flight is swift but short, accompanied with a good deal of whirring. The breeding season is from May to August, and six

to ten eggs are laid on the ground in a loose nest of grass or leaves.

THE BENGAL GREEN PIGEON (*Crocopus phænicopterus*), AND TURTLE DOVES (*Turtur suratensis* and *Turtur risorius*).

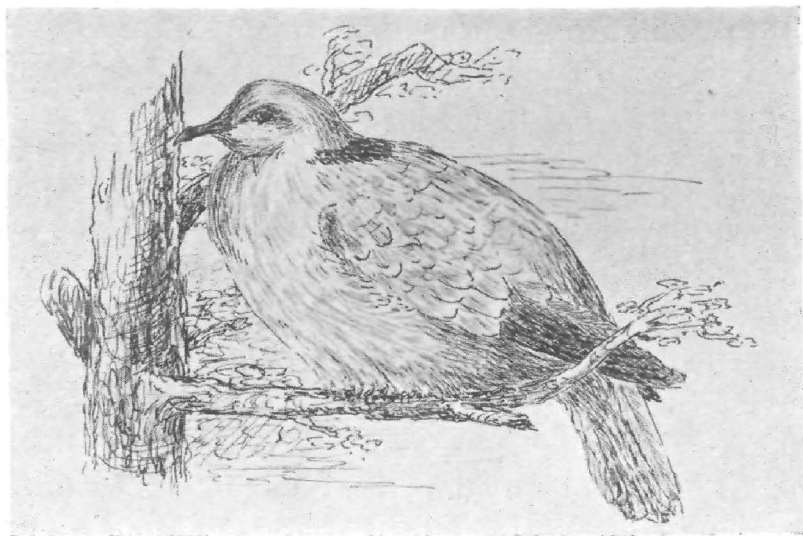
Some sportsmen are rather fond of "drawing the long bow" when relating their shooting experiences, and will tell of enormous bags made at one shot; but there is at least one bird that they can rightly boast about, for, as a rule, where they think they have shot one bird six or seven fall to the charge, and very often a great many more, and this bird is the Green Pigeon (*Crocopus phænicopterus*). As the name implies, the general colour of these birds is green, and it is no easy matter to detect them sitting high up in some lofty pekul or banyan tree. Their notes reach your ears, and, after straining your eyes to the utmost, you make out the form of one, which you fire at, and down it comes with a thud, accompanied by a shower of leaves and twigs. There is a slight pause, and thud again, and another bird falls, and yet another and another, and you may pick up even as many as a dozen birds before you have finished; the reason for this being that a flock of Green Pigeons sit closely perched together. The call of the Green Pigeon is a low, soft whistling, which has been likened to the sound of rippling water. No one seems to have noticed these birds on the ground, and I very much doubt if they ever do settle on it. They probably

obtain their water from the wet leaves of the trees they live in, or perhaps do not require water, feeding as they do on succulent fruits. They are not easily frightened, and even after their numbers have been thinned by shot the rest, after flying a short distance, will return to the same tree. In Darjeeling I used to shoot a number of a certain kind of Green Pigeon by the aid of a native, who used to imitate the bird's notes by blowing through his hands, the Pigeons answering back and all the while coming nearer until lured to their destruction. They build the usual flimsy Pigeon type of nest of twigs, and lay two—and have been known to lay three—white eggs. If taken young they are easily tamed and are not difficult to rear.

Two familiar Indian Doves are the Spotted Dove (*Turtur suratensis*) and the Indian Ring Dove (*Turtur risorius*). The habits of both are much alike. They frequent cultivated lands, gardens, and bamboo jungle, either in pairs or small parties. They breed nearly throughout the year, and the pretty actions of the cock birds courting the hens may often be seen, which is effected in the following manner. The female sits perfectly unconcerned while her mate bows profoundly, inflating his breast and cooing. After this he takes a short flight straight up into the air, and returns with outspread but motionless wings and tail extended to its fullest extent.

Being exclusively grain-feeders, Doves are not popular with agriculturists, but it must be admitted they do in reality little harm, and, besides feeding on

grain, eat a number of seeds of weeds, and are, moreover, excellent eating, which compensates for whatever harm they do. I once heard of a man in India who was tired of eating the everlasting fowl or "*murghi*"—the standard dish of Anglo-Indians—and wished to vary his diet with as little expense to himself as possible. Being the wrong time of the year, game was



RING DOVE.

scarce except Doves, and, spreading a line of corn along a road, concealed himself some short distance away. After some little time a Dove turned up, which was presently joined by others, until there were five or six in a line. The man then fired, bagging the lot, and congratulated himself on his success. This may be taken as a hint by those whose funds are low and who wish to live well and cheaply! Being very tame, Doves

are not at all hard to shoot. A friend of mine told me he once saw a Bengali Baboo, with a very ancient muzzle-loading fowling-piece, carefully stalking a something in a small bush amidst grass jungle. After taking careful aim there was a deafening report, which nearly knocked the sporting native down. The Baboo then picked a something off the ground, and my friend, curious to find out what had been shot, and judging from the tremendous report that it must be something great, asked the man what it was, and was astonished at the sight of the much-mangled remains of what was once a Dove, the Baboo triumphantly holding it up and exclaiming, "*Punduk* (Dove). Sir!" On further enquiries my friend learnt that the Baboo, being short of shot, had filled the barrels of the gun with scrap iron and small stones! Small wonder it was that the gun did not burst and blow the man as well as the Dove to pieces.

The Indian Ring Dove has a soft and pleasing note, a native rendering of it being "*Sursoo do*," i.e., give mustard-seed.

The Red Turtle Dove (*Ænopenelia tranquebarica*) is, to my mind, the most beautiful of all Indian Doves. The male is somewhat larger than a Thrush, and has the general colour—rosy pink, with slate-blue head and black collar. It is found commonly enough in many parts in small flocks on cultivated lands.

THE COOT (*Fulica atra*).

The well-known Coot occurs in countless numbers on all Indian marshes—or "*jheels*," as they are called—and lakes. It is resident all the year round in many places, and only a cold-weather visitor to others. A favourite shooting-ground of mine was a large "*jheel*" situated close to the Tirhoot State Railway in Bengal. Standing on the road alongside the "*jheel*" at sunset, one heard the whistle and rush of many wings, caused by huge flocks of waterfowl, which came there to feed. The commonest bird was the Coot, which simply swarmed in thousands. On a bitterly cold morning in December, about 4 a.m., four of us started for this "*jheel*" to shoot, knowing that before the sun was well up was the best time to get anything. I must admit it was with some reluctance we left our warm beds, and after hastily dressing, and swallowing a cup of tea, mounted our horses and rode off, our servants having gone on ahead with our guns and ammunition. The day was just dawning as we arrived at the "*jheel*" side, and clouds of mist were rising off the water. Our boats were the ordinary country "dug-outs," and leaked horridly. However, making our boatmen fetch us a heap of straw, we lined the bottom of the boat with this, and made ourselves as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. A confused murmur of sounds reached our ears out of the fog, and as the now rising sun caused the banks of mist to lift and roll away, we could see a goodly company of fowl, including thousands of Coots. Stealthily creeping up

in line on passing a clump of rushes, a few Teal were flushed, and a right and left dropped a couple. The noise of the guns broke the spell, which was answered by a roar of wings as the Ducks, now alarmed, rose in every direction. The Coots merely fluttered a short distance, then settled again, and it was not until more shots had been fired that they left the water finally, and circled round and round the boats with quickly beating wings. The fun now became fast and furious; alternate Duck and Coot were dropped, until at length, tired of slaughter, a truce was called. The majority of Coots were given to the boatmen, only a few being reserved by ourselves for soup.

Let the sportsman beware how he handles a wounded Coot, for these birds will scratch like a cat, very often inflicting a nasty sore place, as I know to my cost.

Natives snare numbers of Coot and all kinds of water-fowl by the following method :—In the middle of a big sheet of water nets are fixed between two poles, and allowed to hang rather loosely. On dark nights the Ducks, flying low over the water, go right into the nets and get entangled, and they are also driven into them by the boatmen, who row towards the fowl with lighted torches, keeping up at the same time a vigorous shouting. The wretched Coots then have their legs broken by the men to prevent them escaping, and are sold alive in the bazaars until death mercifully intervenes and puts an end to their sufferings.

Another ingenious way the natives have of catching them is by bird-lime, but this can only be done when the fowl are feeding near the edge of the water. The

fowler first of all provides himself with a large screen made of leaves and grass. This he carries in one hand ; in the other he has a number of bamboos that can be jointed together like a fishing-rod, the last joint being very thin and forked at the end, this being smeared with bird-lime. Hiding himself behind the screen, he crawls to the water's edge, and, one by one, very cautiously joints the pieces of rod together, gradually pushing them all the time near to the flock of Coot or other birds. When he thinks he has got near enough he gives the rod a sharp twist, and the sticky limed ends catch in the bird's plumage. He then draws the bird to him, and slips it into a closed basket at his side. It is surprising how little notice the other birds take of this proceeding, and I have seen a clever fowler catch several, one after the other, before the rest of the flock were aware of what was taking place. Even birds as wary as Grebes and Herons are caught in this way.

Coots are very pugnacious birds, more especially in the breeding season, when rival males can be seen chasing each other away from their own special part and fighting furiously. A very handsome bird the Coot looks in fighting attitude, as, with raised wings and all its feathers puffed out, it dashes at its opponent in true pugilistic style. Coots are the very emblem of a busy, active life. They are hardly ever still for a moment, constantly diving for food or else engaged in fighting. Watching one day to see the time a number of different diving birds remained under water, I noted as follows:—Pochard, half a minute ; Tufted Duck,

half to one and a half minutes; Great Crested Grebe, *three to (sometimes) five minutes*; and Coot, barely a quarter of a minute. They are not adepts at diving, and a wounded bird in clear water is soon recovered. They disappear without a ripple, appearing on the surface again like a cork. Sometimes a large fishing Eagle will cause much consternation among a flock of Coots by hovering over them; they then all huddle together for mutual protection. The late Lord Lilford, writing of this, says:—"I have several times observed the singular manner in which a flock of these birds defend themselves against the White-tailed Eagle. On the appearance over them of one of these birds they collect in a dense body, and when the Eagle stoops at them they throw up a sheet of water with their feet, and completely baffle their enemy; in one instance, . . . they so drenched the Eagle that it was with difficulty that he reached a tree on the shore, not more than a hundred yards from the spot where he attacked them."

The nest of the Coot is a large mass of rushes, placed either on the water not far from the shore or moored to the bank, and it lays seven to nine large eggs, greyish-white spotted with black. The alarm-note of the Coot sounds like "*Chink, chink,*" and may be fairly imitated by knocking two coins together.

THE MOORHEN

(*Gallinula chloropus*).

Being such a thoroughly familiar bird both at home and in India, one would imagine the Moorhen was too well known by all to be mistaken for any other bird, and yet I knew of one gentleman who, because he saw a number of birds *swimming* on a small pond, at once jumped to the conclusion that these must be Duck. He told me of them, and from his description (?) I thought he had seen something rare, and was very anxious to interview these so-called "Duck." Imagine my disappointment to find that they were only Moorhens, and yet my informant had shot several and eaten them, pronouncing them very good. On the few occasions I have eaten Moorhens I certainly found them fair eating, but they must be skinned first, as their skins are, as a rule, so saturated with oil that this quite destroys the flavour, and renders them very nasty indeed. But I imagine few sportsmen would waste a cartridge on them, especially in a country like India, where so many and much more valuable fowl can be obtained so easily. The favourite haunts of the Moorhen are small ponds densely clothed with reeds, whereto, at the least sign of danger, it makes for. When feeding the Moorhen is constantly dipping its head, and on procuring food below the surface of the water plunges forward with a distinct and audible splash. On land it runs with some speed, and is constantly jerking its tail up so as to show the very distinct white under tail-coverts. I once found the nest of a Moor-

hen placed on water amidst some paddy or rice, and on my handling one of the eggs was surprised to see the head of a chick appearing, the eggs being on the point of hatching. The nest of this bird is generally placed on or near water, and it will at times build on



MOORHEN.

trees. One such nest I found was quite fifteen feet up, and I wondered how the old bird would convey her chicks to the water when hatched. The Moorhen is by no means a shy bird, and under favourable conditions becomes almost as tame as a domestic fowl. I

have seen it stated in standard works that the female is more brightly coloured and larger than the male. This, however, is a mistake, as I have proved by dissection, the male being the larger and brighter coloured bird.

Another very familiar Indian bird, closely allied to the present, is the White-breasted Water Hen (*Amaurornis phænicurus*). This bird is not so aquatic in its habits as the Moorhen, and is often seen in gardens busily searching for worms. It is an exceedingly noisy bird, and its loud harsh cry is heard both day and night. I stayed once at a house the garden of which was inhabited by a pair of these birds, which kept me awake most of the night by their cries. They breed during July and August, making a nest of rushes, placed, as a rule, near water. They are very pugnacious, and I have seen them fighting furiously with each other; a pair were so engaged on one occasion that I approached to within a few yards of them before they were aware of my presence.

JACANAS.

The Jaçáñas at first sight resemble Moorhens, but differ in having round and not compressed bodies, and enormously developed long and straight toes, by means of which they are enabled to run with swiftness on floating weeds and lotus leaves. Two species occur in India, both common birds. The Bronze-winged Jaçána (*Metopidius indicus*), a bird of beautiful plumage, is found on tanks and small weedy ponds. It is a some-

what shy and skulking bird, and is said, when alarmed, to conceal itself by lying close on the weeds or plants with outstretched neck. It is an expert diver, and a wounded bird is seldom recovered. It breeds during June, July, and August, making a large floating nest, and lays five eggs. It would appear that this bird, like the Moorhen, undergoes a heavy moult once a year, as Mr. C. M. Inglis writes that he shot a specimen in October that had lost all its primaries and rectrices.

The Pheasant-tailed Jacána (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) must be well known to all sportsmen who have shot over Indian marshes. It has a most peculiar plaintive cry, closely resembling the mewling of a cat. It goes about in small flocks, and is very restless, wandering here and there over the water, and is rather shy and difficult to approach. Unlike the Bronze-winged Jacána, which retains the same plumage throughout the year, the Pheasant-tailed Jacána has two phases, a summer and a winter one. In summer it is an exceedingly handsome bird, having a white head, dark chocolate under parts, bright straw-golden patch on the hind neck, and the tail-feathers are considerably lengthened. In winter the long tail-feathers and golden patch are wanting, the under parts are white, and the head is mottled with brown. Its eggs are unique, being exactly the shape of a peg-top, and olive in colour. This Jacána breeds from July to September, making large nests among rice and water-plants, either on *jheels* or weedy river-beds. My friend, Mr. C. M. Inglis, once showed me an egg of this bird that had

been laid on the spiky leaf of a species of water-lily; the spike, entering the side of the egg, had made a neat round hole, appearing as if it had been done with an egg-drill. These birds dive and swim well. The females in both species of Jaçána are larger than the males.

THE COMMON CRANE (*Grus communis*), AND THE DEMOISELLE (*Anthropoides virgo*).

The Cranes are tall and graceful birds, and often display long and ornamental plumes. In coloration they are plain, being for the most part grey, white, or black. The head in some species, when adult, is more or less naked, the skin being red. They are gregarious and migratory, breeding in cold and temperate climates, and visiting warm countries in winter. Their voice is remarkably loud, and during the breeding season they go through the most extraordinary dances.

The Common Crane arrives in the plains of India about the end of October, and passes most of its time by water, feeding early in the morning on cultivated lands. Before settling they will often fly high round and round the selected spot, trumpeting loudly. Cranes after having fed for some time on grain are excellent eating, but on their first arrival are coarse and ill-flavoured. They are at all times exceedingly wary, and especially so when feeding, and always have a sentinel posted to warn them of danger. They are said, when wounded and pursued, occasionally to take to water

and swim. They roost at night on sand-banks, and sleep on one leg: and thereby hangs a tale. It goes that Frederick the Great kept a man-cook, who had a somewhat exacting mistress, who always insisted upon



COMMON CRANE.

tasting the dishes sent to the king's table. On one occasion she saw a roasted Crane, and her fancy led her to want one of the bird's legs. The cook expostulated in vain: have the Crane's leg she would, or give up her lover. Rather than lose her, the cook risked

his master's displeasure, and cut off the leg, hoping the king would not miss it. Vain hope! The king, in wrath, sent for the cook, and demanded angrily what had become of the Crane's other leg. "May it please your Majesty," replied the man, "Cranes have but one leg." The king, now thoroughly roused, bade the cook accompany him to the royal aviaries. Now it so happened that all the Cranes were asleep, and, of course, standing on one leg. "You see, your Majesty," said the cook, "I spoke the truth." The king thereupon clapped his hands and awoke the Cranes, which immediately put down the other leg, and, turning to the cook, his master asked him what he now had to say. The cook, never at a loss for an answer, replied, "If your Majesty had done that to the other Crane it would, to please your Majesty, doubtless have also produced its other leg!" The king was so amused at the man's ready wit that he forgave him. The Common Crane breeds in Spain, Lapland, Turkestan, Mongolia, and Siberia, and in former days nested in England, where it is now one of the rarest of visitors. It should, however, be borne in mind that the Heron, in England, is often spoken of as a "Crane," and the various reports of the occurrence of the Crane in England should be accepted with caution. I once read in a local paper that a "rare specimen of the Crane family had been shot, and was on view at the local market." This, however, proved to be only a Heron. The nest is placed on the ground in an open swamp or morass.

The handsome little Demoiselle Crane arrives in India with the common bird, and in some parts, as the

Bombay Presidency, is extremely abundant, flocks of over two thousand birds being frequently seen. They are just as wary and difficult to approach as the Common Crane. In this species the whole head is feathered, and it has silky-white ear-tufts and drooping black plume-like feathers from the breast. It is often taken by natives in nets. Mr. C. M. Inglis writes that "some are snared on the banks of the Kamla, in Nepal, every year. At Burreroa my man counted sixteen nets; they were stretched across the dry sand-banks in the middle of the river, and were about fifty yards apart. The nets were forty-five yards long and eight yards high. The men who snared the Cranes were of the 'Bin' caste. The birds sold for rs. 1-4-0 per pair. The netters said that they also sold the legs for medicine at an anna each. . . . They are excellent eating. One flock noticed was flying in extended line slightly arched in the centre, a second in V-shape, and another had not any formation at all."

CORMORANTS.

An old fable tells us that the Cormorant was once a wool merchant, and took for its partners the Bat and the bramble. The vessel containing their wool was wrecked. In consequence the Cormorant is always diving to try and find the lost property; the bramble lays hold of sheep as they pass, to enable it to get wool to make a fresh start; and the Bat hides away during the daytime to escape its numerous creditors!

The Common Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) is

one of those birds that enjoy an almost world-wide distribution, being found nearly throughout Asia, Europe, Africa, Australia, and the coasts of North America. At home it is almost essentially a sea-bird; in India it is, for the greater part, a frequenter of fresh-water, being found throughout the country on large rivers, lakes, and marshes. Cormorants live entirely on fish, which they capture by diving, and are often trained by fishermen in India and China to catch fish for their masters. They swim low in the water, often with the whole body submerged, only part of the neck and head appearing. They are often to be seen sunning themselves on a rock or stump, with the wings partially expanded. The nest is made of twigs, and lined with grass and weeds, and placed on trees or cliffs. They breed in colonies, and the stench of dead and decaying fish arising from these places is almost intolerable. All Cormorants are past-masters in the art of diving, and no bird except Grebes and Divers can touch them in this, though Hume assures us that the Smew (*Mergus albellus*) is even better, but I very much doubt this.

The Little or Pigmy Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax javanicus*) is the most familiar of the three species of Indian Cormorants, and is found throughout India, Ceylon, and Burma. It is entirely a fresh-water bird, and, so far as is at present known, has never been obtained on salt-water. A friend of mine once shot and ate one of these birds, thinking it was a species of Duck! He pronounced it very bad indeed, and exceedingly fishy. I have had them offered to me by natives as "Teal," and in cases like these a knowledge of birds

comes in very useful. In England I have frequently seen Curlew exposed for sale as "Woodcock," but the most horrible case of mistaken identity I heard of was when a young man, newly arrived in India, shot a Vulture and ate it, thinking it was a Wild Turkey! The Little Cormorant is usually seen in small parties or flocks. One I counted had over forty individuals. It breeds in considerable numbers on trees, in company with the Common Cormorant, Herons, Spoonbills, Pelicans, and Ibises, and lays three to five eggs, chalky white in texture.

HERONS.

By nearly every piece of water in India, whether it be river, lake, or pond, will be seen, fishing quietly, a small Heron, known to Anglo-Indians as "Paddy Bird," or, to give it its correct name, Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayi*). I think one of the most attractive features of Indian bird-life is the Heron family, so generously distributed throughout the country—from the Common and Purple Herons, beautiful Snowy Egrets, to the little Dwarf Bitterns. Every piece of water has its Herons in some form or another, and none are so common as the "Paddy Bird." Its colour, as it patiently waits for its finny prey, so blends with its surroundings as to make it almost invisible; but as it is disturbed it flies up, uttering a harsh croak, and displays its conspicuous white wings. In the breeding season it is a lovely creature, resembling that most exquisite of all Herons, the Squacco Heron (*Ardeola*

ralloides) of Europe, to which it is closely allied. The breeding plumes of this and the other Herons are much sought after by a class of natives whose business it is to snare birds, and a good price they fetch, or *used* to fetch, in the Calcutta market. Thanks to the trouble a lot of people have taken in India, a Society for the Protection of Birds has sprung up, and the Herons, with others, come under its influence. Such a good work as this deserves every support, for what would a country be without its birds? and the Herons are a family of birds we could ill afford to lose, and, as I have said before, add much to the charm of many an Indian landscape. I once saw a Pond Heron fishing quietly by a pond, when a Hawk (*Accipiter virgatus*) made a swoop on it. The "Paddy Bird" at once threw itself back into a fighting attitude, and the Hawk missed its aim and fell into the water, where it remained struggling for a few minutes, but eventually recovered itself, and flew off, let us hope, a sadder but a wiser bird. The Pond Heron breeds during July and August, in colonies, making a nest of sticks, and placed either on a mango or pepul tree, as a rule, not far from water, though I have known some heronries a considerable distance away. The eggs are from three to five in number, and a pale blue in colour.

The Common Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) is found in abundance in most parts of India wherever there are any large sheets of water. Of all wary birds the Heron is the wariest, and is extremely difficult to approach. It is a solitary bird, and will stand in the water for hours at a time watching for its prey; then

with a sudden thrust of its long and powerful bill im-



COMMON HERON (after Thorburn).

pales the wretched fish. Only on two occasions have

I got within very close range of this bird. The first happened one night in bright moonlight, at about 9 p.m., and I got so close as almost to touch it with a walking-stick. Whether the moon had any effect on its usually keen sight I am unable to say, but it seemed to have no fear whatever. The second occasion was one afternoon, when, by dint of careful stalking, I got to within about fifteen yards of one fishing, and I watched it for quite half an hour before it took wing, being frightened by the voices of some passers-by. It waded very cautiously, treading as if, to use the expression, "on hot bricks," lifting its feet well out of the water, until its long neck-plumes were almost submerged. In this position it fished, every now and again capturing a small fish, which it swallowed by jerking head first down its throat by a series of gulps. After swallowing the fish it drank water several times, as if to make sure of its prey reaching its destination. The Heron is most destructive among fish, and often kills more than it can eat, simply for the sake of killing. The cry of the Heron is a harsh "*fraank*." Besides fish it feeds on frogs and snakes, and even the young chicks of the Moorhen fall a prey to its voracious appetite. The flight is slow and heavy, and when well on the wing the bird always flies at a good height, quite out of gunshot. In some parts of India Herons and Storks are caught alive by birdcatchers, who sew the poor birds' eyelids together, and the helpless birds are then placed near water as a decoy for water-fowl. Such abominable acts of cruelty as this, I am sorry to say, are only too common. On one occa-

sion I saw a number of Storks wading aimlessly about in some shallow water. Being surprised at their apparent tameness, I went up to investigate, and found the birds treated as above. I shot every one of them, to put them out of their misery, much to the disgust of their owner. The Heron breeds throughout India, from April to July.

The Eastern Purple Heron (*Ardea manillensis*) is abundant throughout India, Ceylon, and Burma. It is even, if possible, more wary than the Common Heron. It is very retiring, and keeps hidden in long grass or dense reed-beds, only its long neck and head appearing occasionally over the tops of these. Unlike the Common Heron, it nests on the ground.

The Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus coromandus*) is almost as familiar as the Pond Heron, and is less aquatic in its habits than any member of the family, and may often be seen, in company with Crows and Mynahs, following the plough. It derives its name from its habit of perching sometimes on the backs of cattle, and attending these to feed on numerous ticks and other insects that infest these animals. In the breeding season this species develops a dorsal train of beautiful orange aigrette feathers. It is not, as is the case with many Herons, a shy bird. When caught young these birds make good pets.

Among Herons should be here mentioned the Great White Heron (*Herodias alba*), the Little Egret (*H. garzetta*), and the Lesser White Egret (*H. intermedia*), all of which furnish the feathers of fashion known as "Egrets." All are common Indian birds.

The Little Green Heron (*Butorides javanicus*), though common, is not often seen, owing to its shy and retiring habits, skulking during the day in dense reed-beds, and only leaving these at nightfall to feed. It is a small bird, being from fifteen to sixteen inches in length. It breeds in tamarind and other trees in July and August.

The Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*) is a shy and solitary bird, always found singly or in pairs among thick rushes on the edge of swamps. It lies so close to the ground as to be almost trodden on before taking wing. Its colour so harmonizes with the nature of the ground on which it is found as to render it almost invisible. No one can form any idea of the exquisite shades of colour in the plumage of the Bittern from stuffed specimens or dried skins, and you must see the living bird, or one just after death, before the bloom, so to speak, has left. This is the case with a good many birds, especially among the water-fowl. Take, for instance, the bills of the Wigeon and Pintail. In life the colour is a pale blue marked with black, which soon fades after the death of the bird. It is the inability to restore this colouring in stuffed specimens that makes most examples of taxidermy a failure. Many of the practitioners of this art have never seen half the birds they set up in a living state or in their native haunts. How can they, then, be expected to do them correctly? The best picture of a bird that ever was painted does not do justice to the living creature. Exquisite in form and colour are the family of Ducks; yet how different they look made up as skins or mounted in glass cases. But, as I have said, there

are some birds that one *must* see to advantage in their native haunts, and one of these is the Bittern. Its flight is slow and heavy, and when put up suddenly it ascends in spiral circles before making off finally. When wounded the Bittern is no mean antagonist, and with its long bill and deadly aim can inflict considerable damage, and I once narrowly escaped having my hand run through as I attempted to pick up a wounded one. The Bittern is said to make a booming noise like the bellowing of a bull, and it was a common belief amongst English rustics that the bird produced this sound by thrusting its head and beak into the water. In Thomson's 'Seasons' we read: "The Bittern knows his time, with bill submerged, to shake the sounding marsh." In its habits the Bittern is strictly nocturnal. It is fairly common in many parts of India, where it is a winter visitor, but there is only one instance of its breeding in the country, a nest with young being found by Mr. E. C. Stuart-Baker in Cachar.

THE COTTON TEAL (*Nettopus coromandelianus*),
AND THE SMALL WHISTLING TEAL
(*Dendrocycna javanica*).

The names of both these birds are apt to be misleading, insomuch that neither are "Teal" at all. In general appearance the Cotton Teal somewhat resembles a small Goose, but has really no connection with the Geese, but closer affinities with the true Ducks. Being found almost throughout the Indian

Empire, this bird occurs in some places in flocks of several hundred individuals. Its favourite haunts are weedy tanks and gheels, where it may be seen either resting on the water and picking about on the surface like a Moorhen, or else flying low, but swiftly, uttering a cackling cry which has been likened to "Fix bayonets." They are not by any means shy, and at times almost confiding; and I have seen them scores of times on some small village pond swimming about with the utmost indifference to men and women washing or drawing water, and the various noises connected with an Indian village. On the wing, in the bright sunshine, the males appear very beautiful, as their metallic green wings flash and scintillate, having the appearance of "shot-green" silk. The majority of sportsmen will never shoot Cotton Teal, having an idea that they are unfit for food. I must say I have found them very fair eating, but this was in the hot weather, when, all game being scarce, anything of a change came in very welcome in place of the eternal fowl. Natives, however, prefer them to many of the more delicately flavoured Ducks. I think in many places the Cotton Teal is a local migrant, disappearing altogether during certain seasons. I was most unfortunate in not being able to discover its nest. Mr. E. C. Stuart-Baker, who was more fortunate, says: "I have found nests quite low down, in trees only just above water-level in fact, but have never taken them from a hole at any height from the ground, and cannot now recall to mind any which were over fifteen or sixteen feet from it. They do, however, sometimes select very

lofty situations, for Oates took one nest containing ten eggs from a mango-tree, about thirty feet above the ground. They are said also to breed sometimes in old ruins, broken-down walls, &c. . . . They do not always make use of places quite close to water, as a pair of these birds laid their eggs in a gigantic tree standing in the magistrate's compound in Rungpore. At the back of the house there was a good-sized tank, frequented by a pair of these birds, and as they were so constantly present, I hunted all round the tank, in every tree, for the nest. However, it was not to be found, though holes and hollows which looked suitable for nesting were common enough. Eventually I found the nest by accident, in a tree in front of the house, and full two hundred yards from the tank. This . . . contained twenty-two eggs."

It would appear that the Cotton Teal occasionally nests on the water, as Blewitt says: "It makes a semi-floating nest on the water, among the rushes or lotus leaves, of weeds, grass, &c., all together, filled up several inches above the water-level."

It is said that, when nesting any height from the ground, the parent-bird conveys her brood to the water by carrying them with her feet; but this statement requires confirmation. Cotton Teal are expert divers, and when wounded disappear beneath the water like magic.

The Small Whistling Duck might well be called the "Tree Duck," seeing that it both nests and perches on trees. It is, if possible, more plentiful than the Cotton Teal, occurring not only in hundreds but thousands.

They are tame, and allow a near approach, but are quite unfit for food, being very rank and fishy. They are found alike on large *jheels*, tanks, and quite small ponds. One such pond I saw was literally covered with them, and the flock, as it was put up, was a sight to see. I have had several nestlings brought to me, but never managed to rear any. Hume has a curious story about the Whistling Duck. He says :—" I once saw a good, large, half-wild village cat spring down upon a Duck, which was sitting on her nest in a broad four-pronged fork of a mango-tree. The Duck did not whistle in the usual manner, she positively screamed ; in a second the Drake dashed at the cat, and, to my surprise, down came a Black Crow (*Corvus macro-rhynchus*), not, as any one would have thought, to steal the eggs in the confusion, but to assail the cat with claws and beak, as if his own homestead had been attacked. In less time than it takes to describe, the cat was squalling in her turn, and fled up one of the branches, pursued closely by the Drake and the Crow, who were immediately joined by another Crow, and the three made it so hot for pussy that she sprang to the ground, where my dogs, aroused by the uproar above (the noise those two Crows made was astounding), were awaiting her, and, before I could interfere, and before she quite recovered the jump of some thirty-five or forty feet, killed her outright. But the strangest part of the business was that the villagers assured me that this nest was the Crows' own nest, and that *they lent it every year*, after their young had flown, to the Whistling Teal. I should have verified this the next

spring, but left the Mynpooree district, and never again had a chance of visiting the spot." The flight of this bird, though accompanied with a good deal of flapping, is by no means swift.

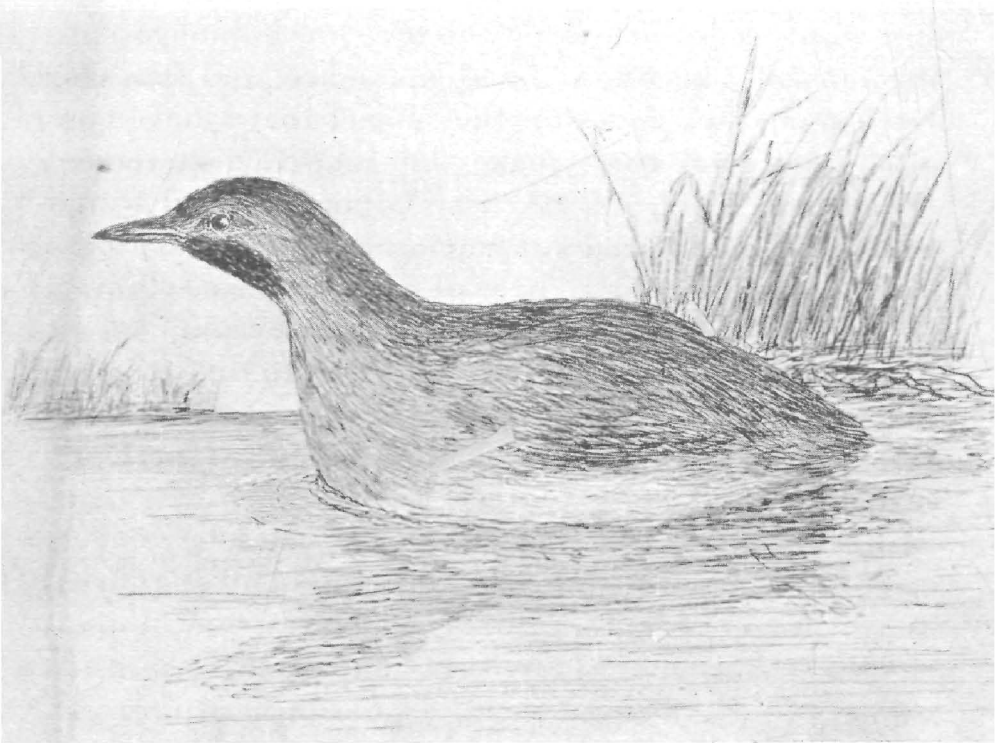
GREBES.

The Grebes may at once be distinguished from all other birds in the following important respects. Their feet are lobed, each toe bearing a separate broad lobe, the whole foot closely resembling in shape a horse-chestnut leaf. The tail is merely a wisp of down. In the breeding season the heads of most species are adorned with handsome tufts or crests. But most characteristic is the remarkable silkiness of the plumage, especially that of the breast, which is in the larger species an important article of commerce.

The Indian Dabchick, or Little Grebe (*Podiceps albipennis*), differs very little from its European ally (*P. fluviatilis*), and, indeed, by many naturalists it is only regarded as subspecifically distinct. In habits and mode of nesting, &c., it does not differ one whit from the European bird. In the cold season it is to be found in small parties on all *jheels* and tanks. In the summer it migrates locally, and the paired birds resort for breeding purposes to almost anywhere where there is sufficient water and shelter, being then found among paddy-fields, quite small ponds, or even moderate-sized ditches. It is thoroughly aquatic, and is rarely seen on the wing. Like all the other members of the family, it is a "professional" diver, and on the slightest approach

of danger always disappears under water like magic, without leaving hardly a ripple on the surface, to appear again some yards further off from where it dives, only to immediately disappear again, and so on, until it fancies itself safe. In Bengal, at any rate, it commences breeding in July, and many a time I have had good opportunities of watching them whilst nesting. Both birds during this time kept up a curious rattling cry, though they are as a rule quite silent at other times of the year. The nest is very untidy, being a large floating structure, not fastened to any reeds, nor is any attempt made at binding the materials together in any way; it is simply a rotting mass of weeds and leaves. It is a mystery to me how some of the eggs are ever hatched, lying as they do in a nest soaked through and through with water; and I feel sure the eggs are mostly incubated by the heat of the sun, as I have never seen the birds sitting during the day. The eggs are always covered over with damp weeds, and these, combined with the heat of the sun, no doubt set up a sort of fermentation that aids incubation. During this period they are very restless, and keep on taking short flights across the water, and make a good deal of noise. The male is most attentive to the female, and always keeps close to her, feeding her on small fish and aquatic insects. The young when first hatched are pretty little creatures, covered with greyish down and striped with black. I once surprised a party of these birds, consisting of one old one and five young. The young at once tried to conceal themselves by hiding among the weeds, while

the old one tried to draw my attention from them by fluttering, as if wounded, in front of my boat. Constant persecution makes them exceedingly wary, but, on the other hand, if not molested, they get comparatively tame. The nests I have never found placed far out on



LITTLE GREBE.

the water, but quite close to the edge, and within easy reaching distance. The Dabchick always appears larger on the water than it really is, owing to its habit of raising the wings in exactly the same way that a Swan does. They are exceedingly pugnacious, and I have at times seen them drive Coots right off the

water. The Dabchick undergoes two phases of plumage. In winter the upper parts are brown and lower parts silky white. In summer the upper parts are a very dark brown, approaching almost to black; the cheeks and throat are black; the neck a chestnut-red; lower parts silky grey, suffused with streaks of brown. Some birds retain traces of the breeding plumage until November. This is my own experience, and that also of the numerous books on the subject that I have consulted; but Mr. Finn makes the startling statement ('Zoologist,' 1902, p. 303) that—"The so-called winter plumage is merely that of immaturity in this species. I have never seen the pair of birds whose actions I have noted in any but full adult summer plumage at any time. It is possible, of course, that this pair are abnormal, or very old individuals, but there is no proof of this, and they are free birds, leading a perfectly normal life in every way."

In this I am not inclined to agree, and I have never seen birds in mid-winter in anything but the usual winter dress, and very likely, as Mr. Finn himself suggests, these birds of his were abnormal. The usual number of eggs is from three to five, pure white when first laid, but they soon get soiled by the action of decaying vegetation on which they are placed. If a side-blown egg of any of the Grebes be held up to the light, it will be seen that the inner texture is a most delicate and beautiful green. All Grebes, especially the Dabchick, have a most peculiar odour that clings persistently to the skin, even after it has dried and lain for years in a cabinet.

The Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), though not nearly such a common bird as the Dabchick, is far from rare in many parts of India. It is a winter visitor, though there are a few instances on record of its having bred in the country. Most of the birds obtained in India are either in the winter or immature plumage, and, therefore, do not show the handsome ear-tufts and ruff, so characteristic of the adult in nuptial dress. It is one of the best birds at diving, and I know of no other that can touch it in this respect. I have had exceptionally good opportunities of watching a pair of these birds nesting, and the following notes were made on the spot. The birds were first seen in April, and almost at once commenced nesting. A few days later I again visited the place, and found the two birds swimming apart from each other. After a short time they met, and began to spar with their bills—no doubt a pairing gesture. What I took to be the female bird then scrambled on a small islet and disappeared among the reeds. A pair of Coots (*Fulica atra*) were nesting on the same place, and tried to drive what I took to be the male bird away. Once they were successful, but after a time the Grebe became master of the situation and drove the Coots away. The way he drove off one Coot was distinctly ingenious. Diving some little distance apart, he suddenly came right up under the Coot, and fairly “torpedoed” the Coot out of the water. The male bird then rested on the water near the islet, drying and preening its feathers. When it wished to clean its breast, it would turn right over on its back, with one leg sticking up in the air.

The female bird, when she landed on the islet, did not stand upright, but dragged herself along on her belly. I did not revisit the place again until May, and found the female bird sitting close. The male was swimming near at hand, and again drove some Coots away that came too near the nest. In September I saw two young birds in company with the parents, which were very attentive to them, feeding them on small fish. The following year to this the Grebes again came to the same place in February. I at first only caught sight of one bird, which was in full breeding plumage. On looking through my field-glasses I saw it treading water, splashing with its wings, and spinning round and round like a teetotum, with crest raised to its full extent. Presently, with neck stretched in front of him (I say "him," for this was the one I took to be the male), he uttered a hoarse croak, and lay flat on the water, flapping his wings vigorously. I saw then the cause of his excitement, for coming towards him was another Grebe, also stretched along the water in the same strange position as the first. The two met breast to breast, and chattered together and sparred with their bills. This second bird was not like the first, and still retained the winter plumage, and was probably an immature female. The two then swam in company with each other, and visited the nesting-place of last year. This was, however, covered with water, with the exception of a few stumps of wood and reeds. The male bird appeared, however, to recognize the place, and dived, bringing up a bunch of weed, which he offered to the other bird. The two

played with it for a little while, then left it. What made the Grebe bring up this weed? For they do not feed on it; it is the stuff their nests are made of. Could he have mistaken the time of year, and thought the nest ought to have been commenced? No; it was only, perhaps, a passing whim, or he would not finally have left the weed. I am certain this young bird was not the female of last year, and probably this action, on the part of the male, of lifting the weed was to show the female how and where to build the nest.

The cry of the Great Crested Grebe sounds like "Erak, erak, erak, erak, ka, ka"; and, again, like "Ak, ah, ak, ah"; and "Er, erak, er, erak," mingled with a buzzing sound. When these birds are at rest, the head is drawn back between the shoulders, with the bill either straight in front, or else tucked under a wing, and usually one leg sticking out of the water. They are constantly preening their feathers, and their breasts shine in the sun as silver, especially young birds, which have a purer white breast. The time these birds remain under water after a dive, I noted, was from three to five minutes. When diving, they either roll sideways under and disappear without a ripple, or in head first.

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